



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES
A Healthcare Service Agency

Dannel P. Malloy
Governor

Miriam Delphin- Rittmon Ph.D.
Commissioner

Memorandum:

TO: Planning and Development Committee

FROM: Commissioner Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D., DMHAS

DATE: February 19, 2016

SUBJECT: Written Testimony on House Bill 5176

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Miller and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee. I am Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and I am writing today to address HB 5176 AN ACT CONCERNING COMMUNITY RESIDENCES.

Housing is an important piece of the recovery equation for our clients, especially when there are so many struggling to find a place to live and the supply of reasonably priced housing throughout the state is so limited.

DMHAS is a healthcare agency. The individuals we serve are persons with a psychiatric disability or substance use disorder. These behavioral health disorders are healthcare conditions with defined diagnostic criteria that are treated with established and effective treatment protocols. We provide services to around 109,000 individuals living in communities across Connecticut. We are committed to helping the people we serve achieve the highest possible level of recovery from their psychiatric disability or substance use disorder; our clients should expect this of their healthcare provider. Recovery includes helping individuals learn how to manage their illness, which I believe we do well. Success is more likely when individuals have a safe, decent place to live, which supports prospects for sustained recovery. Housing is a basic right for all Connecticut citizens. Unfortunately, lack of housing is one of the biggest obstacles that people face in their recovery efforts. As a department, it is an ongoing struggle for us to find decent, affordable housing for the people we serve.

DMHAS is always willing to work with municipalities to ensure the people we serve are welcomed into the communities they choose to live. We are also willing to work so that those we serve make good neighbors. We would welcome the contact information of individuals in any municipality that are available to troubleshoot any problems should they arise.

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H.B. 5176 would require the Department of Public Health, the Department of Developmental Services and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to report annually to a specified municipal liaison regarding existing residence sites or proposed sites that are agency affiliated within the municipality. Notifying an agent of a municipality of a resident simply because of the resident's medical condition, which, in the case of our department, means a mental illness or substance abuse disorder, would be a violation of protected health care information. The privacy of medical information, which includes confirming that services are being delivered to an individual, is protected under both state and federal law.

Providing information regarding proposed sites may result in attempts to deny housing to people we serve; people who have protections under state and federal law against discrimination. Denying permission to site certain group homes could result in the State having to defend legal challenges under both Connecticut and Federal Fair Housing laws.

In closing I want to make sure I extend an offer to help any individual or neighbor in a community who may benefit from our services. We have thirteen Local Mental Health Authorities (LMHAs) and three satellite offices throughout the state. Some LMHAs are state-operated and some are private non-profits. The LMHAs provide directly, or contract with other community agencies to provide mental health and addiction services. They are "our folks on the ground" in your communities, and they have the responsibility for serving the geographic areas they cover. They are available to assist with any housing concerns that may arise. Please do not hesitate to contact them.

Thank you for your consideration on this matter. I appreciate the opportunity to address this important issue today.